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REPORT ON CORRECTIVE TREATMENT OF A GROUP OF MONOTONES. I

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In this report, the term "monotone" will be used to designate such children as are retarded musically from any cause, physical or mental. The experiment here recorded, of segregating the monotones of Grades I and II of the University Elementary School of the University of Chicago, was carried on during the school year 1921-22 by a departmental teacher vitally interested in the subject of monotone cure and really desirous that no child shall go through his school career shut off from participation in one of the most healthful and joy-giving activities of the school program. That such isolation has been one of the poignant distresses of childhood is evidenced by the keen interest which parents who are themselves monotones evince in the work of awakening a retarded child to melodic concept and melodic expression.

Most adult monotones are individuals who have not had melody presented to them at the right time in the right way. The right time is before self-consciousness inhibits individual work; the right way is with simple material and tactful presentation. The shortest time required to cure a monotone habit recorded in this school is six weeks; the longest nearly five years.

A case is considered cured for school purposes when the child can sing a melody accurately with others or with supporting accompaniment. Occasionally, however, a retarded child develops complete independence. Parental co-operation in preserving an expectant attitude is an important factor in the work. In most cases this expectancy is far from sincere in the beginning, but amused chagrin and incredulity finally merge into actual hopefulness, usually justified by the result.

The condition of the monotone is chiefly psycho-physical, and psychology enters largely into the method of its modification and

transformation. The chief classifiable causes of monotone singing appear to be the following: (1) wrong vocal habit (use of chest register), (2) inexpressiveness (immaturity), (3) lack of interest (incentive to concentrate), (4) lack of melodic perception, and (5) muscular inco-ordination.

Wrong vocal habit.—Wrong vocal habits frequently appear even among musically gifted children who have been urged to sing at from two to three years of age. They come to the first grade with a habit of using the muscular adjustment which belongs properly only to the lower tones of the vocal range. This adjustment which produces the chest register of the voice leaves them capable of considerable power, and musical children, imitating their elders or urged by an adult piano accompaniment, use it to achieve a respectable volume of sound. Their sense of melody drives them to make extraordinary effort to reach the higher pitches of songs using this muscular voice, with the result that singing fatigues them and sustained legato singing is almost impossible.

With the musically retarded child, the motive of love of melody being absent, there is no inner urge to great muscular effort. He therefore sings along the low pitches of his chest register. Ear-training will not produce an appreciable result until the idea of the light singing tone is inculcated. The teacher must learn experimentally to distinguish between the head and chest registers of the child voice, and must use devices for gaining and retaining a normal tone-quality. All work in the cure of the monotone habit is based on the correct use of the voice. The following is a typical vocalize for voice placing:

Ro - ses, ro - ses, Who will buy my ro - ses?

Inexpressiveness.—The child who comes to the first grade with the inconsequential habits of babyhood and who has had no home encouragement to listen to child-music which he might have been

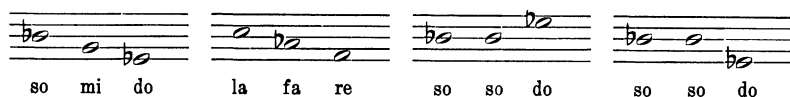
able to grasp, having thus failed to gain any melodic concept, sings high or low at will, usually out of rhythm, often repeating a beat later what the other children are saying. He is playing at singing as he would play any other imitative game. Individual work of the simplest character is necessary until he wakens to the essential requirements of group singing.

Lack of interest.—A lack of interest comes usually from lack of experience. The child has not sensed a charm in melody. He may have been more or less environed by adult music without having his attention drawn to any beauty sufficiently simple for him to perceive. He has not been mentally awakened.

It is the task of the teacher to use material capable of giving delight (there is a psychological need that she herself enjoy it), bringing the pupil frequently into aural contact therewith. Class reaction will help his individual reaction. His response is shown when in the free play period of choosing songs he shows a decided preference.

Lack of melodic perception.—All monotones lack melodic perception, but they are rarely, if ever, incurable in this respect. In a repertoire of six or eight songs, a monotone child will usually be able to recognize a melody sung with a neutral syllable or played on the piano, but he is often entirely unable to express the melody. An interested child announces that he has sung a song at home for his parents, perhaps has taught it to a younger child, and remains satisfied with his achievement though, when attempting to prove his ability to the teacher, his singing is without a vestige of melody.

Short melodic phrases for individual singing repeated from day to day finally become mentally photographed and can be expressed outside of class work. The following sequence of figures has proved useful for this purpose:

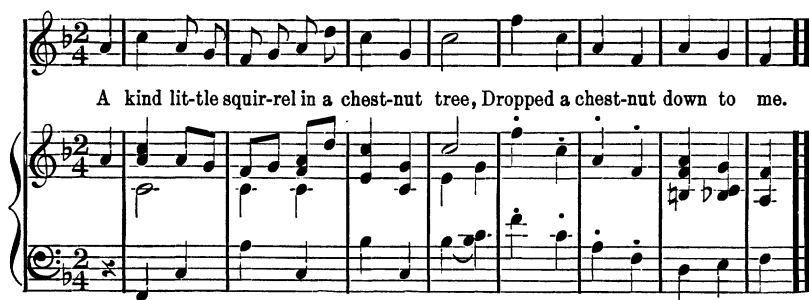


Muscular inco-ordination.—The cure for muscular inco-ordination in the monotone habit depends on the inspiration of musical content. If the child becomes sufficiently eager to express

the melodic beauty of a song, he makes the muscular co-ordination necessary to produce sustained tones along its pitches. If he does not feel the thrill of inspiration, his voice remains wavering and broken, its tones staccato and raised to required high pitches with spasmodic effort. His voice and manner of singing are like the angular involuntary motions which his body makes when not at rest. As general muscular co-ordination does not appear among these children until the second or third year of school, it is well not to require great effort in the beginning but to wait until this comes spontaneously from their own awakened desire.

Unless there is opportunity for segregation of monotones, such children are included in the general work of the grade to their own detriment and that of the class. The good results of the few moments of individual drill which may be vouchsafed them are counteracted by the effect of uncriticized endeavor in class singing of material beyond their capabilities. The self-accepted monotone is thus created.

Grade IB was made up in the autumn of 1921 of twenty-eight children, none of whom had had school experience. The class was scheduled to have three half-hour periods per week of music instruction. A short song was chosen to introduce the subject at



the first lesson. The song was selected as presenting a minimum of difficulty and a maximum of charm. The melody starts in the middle of the child's vocal range, leading him to use his head register; it contains the natural intervals of the tonic triad and moves in slow tempo with flowing rhythm, while the text contains a pleasantly inspiring thought. Its most useful feature is the

phrase "dropped a chestnut" which may be employed as drill material. This song was sung to the children with piano accompaniment; the words were then recited by the teacher to guard against misunderstanding, and the song was sung again. Several children immediately joined in the singing, expressing satisfaction in the result. The right atmosphere having been created, to lose no impetus the song was immediately followed by an exercise in matching single tones and simple intervals sung with *loo*. This was quickly followed by what every child could do with some degree of success—the clapping of two-pulse rhythm. The intent of this diversion was to keep everyone alert. The clapping was followed by pulse-picturing on the board, and the teacher and the children parted at the end of the half-hour in good humor.

By the third lesson it was evident that several monotones were present. Since these would be a handicap to the work of the normal children and would themselves be in danger of forming a permanent habit of monotone singing if given only class instruction, the class was divided into two sections on the basis of musical development. Each group was to have a fifteen-minute period of instruction three times a week. This arrangement gave the normal children an opportunity for detailed and critical training in tone-placing, accurate intonation, proper enunciation, and rhythmic precision.

The monotone group numbered thirteen, among them the various types which show musical retardation. One only had any melodic perception, and he forced a strident chest voice up to \bar{E} with violent effort and disastrous effect. Two were inaudible from timidity. One, a fat and lymphatic child, warbled high or low in a flexible, breathy voice without a melodic idea, but with evident sensuous pleasure in the activity. Four were docile and attentive but apparently were experiencing their first personal contact with music. Three carried over a harsh, crackling speaking voice into their singing. Two seemed unable to grasp the purpose of the class and needed frequently to be brought back to the work in hand.

Singing being a racial expression, there is not likely to be difficulty in gaining a response from any child when music with content suited to his age is presented, but the effort to enable each

one to hear, hold, and express musical forms encounters certain obstacles.

Of first importance is a sense of expectancy, looking forward to success on the part of the group; no discouragement or sense of failure must enter the lesson. As it is difficult to preserve such an atmosphere when the more able children are present, this constitutes a chief reason for segregation.

Piano accompaniment may well be used during the work of monotone cure, always with a view to surrounding the subject with charm. The instrument can be so arranged that its resonance is partially dampened. To those who regard musical vibrations merely as sound there must be no wearisome effects of noise. The accompaniments for exercises, vocalizes, and songs should provide a rhythmic-harmonic background of educative value, awakening a sense of tonal beauty. Often through the year, after phrases and melodies have been practiced by individuals and groups, the children beg, "Now play the music." Often, "Just play the music with two hands without any singing." They learn to respond to various rhythms through this repetition of the harmonious flow of familiar songs.

As soon as the attitude of interest in melody has been established, the teacher may proceed with the training exercises. Some examples of such exercises will be presented in a subsequent article.

[To be concluded]